



TEXAS
Department of Family
and Protective Services

Transportation Study Report

**As Required by the
2022-23 General Appropriations Act,
Senate Bill 1, 87th Legislature,
Regular Session, 2021
(Article II, Department of Family and
Protective Services, Rider 50)**

December 1, 2022

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Executive Summary

Pursuant to the 2022-23 General Appropriations Act, Senate Bill 1, 87th Legislature, Regular Session, 2021 (Article II, Department of Family and Protective Services [DFPS], Rider 50), DFPS must conduct a study to determine the transportation options available and needs for children and parents in order to improve reunification outcomes. This study must be submitted no later than December 1, 2022, to the Legislative Budget Board, the Governor, the House Committee on Appropriations, the Senate Committee on Finance, the House Committee on Human Services, the Senate Committee on Health and Human Services, and any standing Joint Legislative Oversight Committees, as appropriate.

DFPS conducted a literature review of relevant articles pertaining to the effects of transportation in child welfare cases to determine if transportation services improve permanency outcomes for children and families in the child welfare system. The published articles establish that transportation improves access to family services and visitation, placement stability, and the chances of reunification.

DFPS also convened a transportation focus group comprised of DFPS human service technicians (HST) and Texas Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) participants all of whom provided a unique perspective on the role transportation plays in a case. The focus group highlighted the critical role of HSTs in providing transportation assistance to support children and families achieving permanency through reunification with their parents, mainly through concentrated efforts to ensure a child's transportation.

When there is reliable transportation, parents have better access to services and parent-child visitations. Therefore, transportation access and availability are integral to increasing reunification permanency rates.

Introduction

Pursuant to Rider 50, DFPS presents this report to the Legislative Budget Board, the Governor, the House Committee on Appropriations, the Senate Committee on Finance, the House Committee on Human Services, the Senate Committee on Health and Human Services, and any standing Joint Legislative Oversight Committees, as appropriate. This report reviews the transportation options available and needs for children and parents to increase reunification permanency rates.

In preparation for this report, DFPS conducted a literature review and convened a transportation focus group. The literature review covered the existing research pertaining to the effects of transportation in child welfare cases.

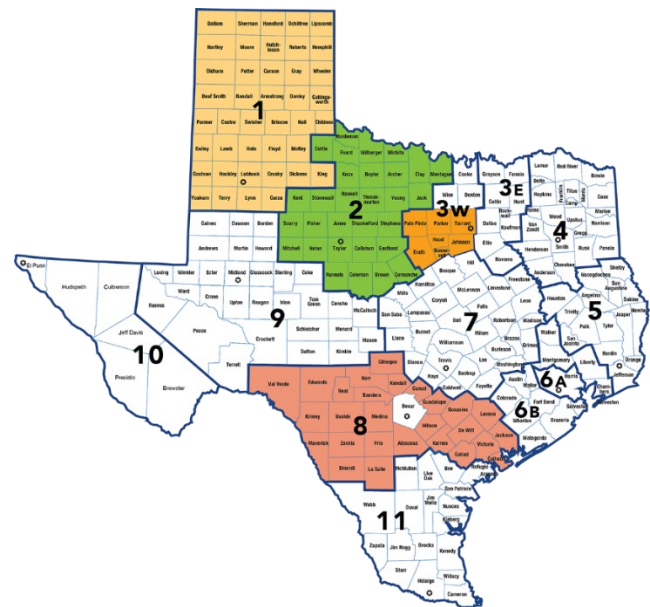
Comprised of DFPS HSTs and CASA representatives, the focus group shed light in a qualitative manner on the role that transportation plays in a case. When transportation is a barrier, parents may struggle to finish or even begin the necessary tasks of the court order for a successful completion of their case. Moreover, the providers and services with whom parents are obligated to participate may be geographically spread out and far from the parents' home or town.

Background

With 268,597 square miles, Texas is physically larger than every country in Europe and second only to Alaska in geographical size compared to other states. Texas is served by 11 DFPS geographic regions by either DFPS legacy or Single Source Continuum Contractors as part of Community-Based Care. See Figure 1.

Texas is also a highly populated state with an estimated 29,527,941 residents as of July 1, 2021,¹ clustered around the metropolitan areas of Houston, San Antonio, Austin, the Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex, and El Paso. Each are fast growing areas listed in the top 25 largest cities in the United States (U.S.) and

Figure 1. DFPS Regions and Community-Based Care Catchment Areas



¹ United States Census Bureau. Retrieved from <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/TX>

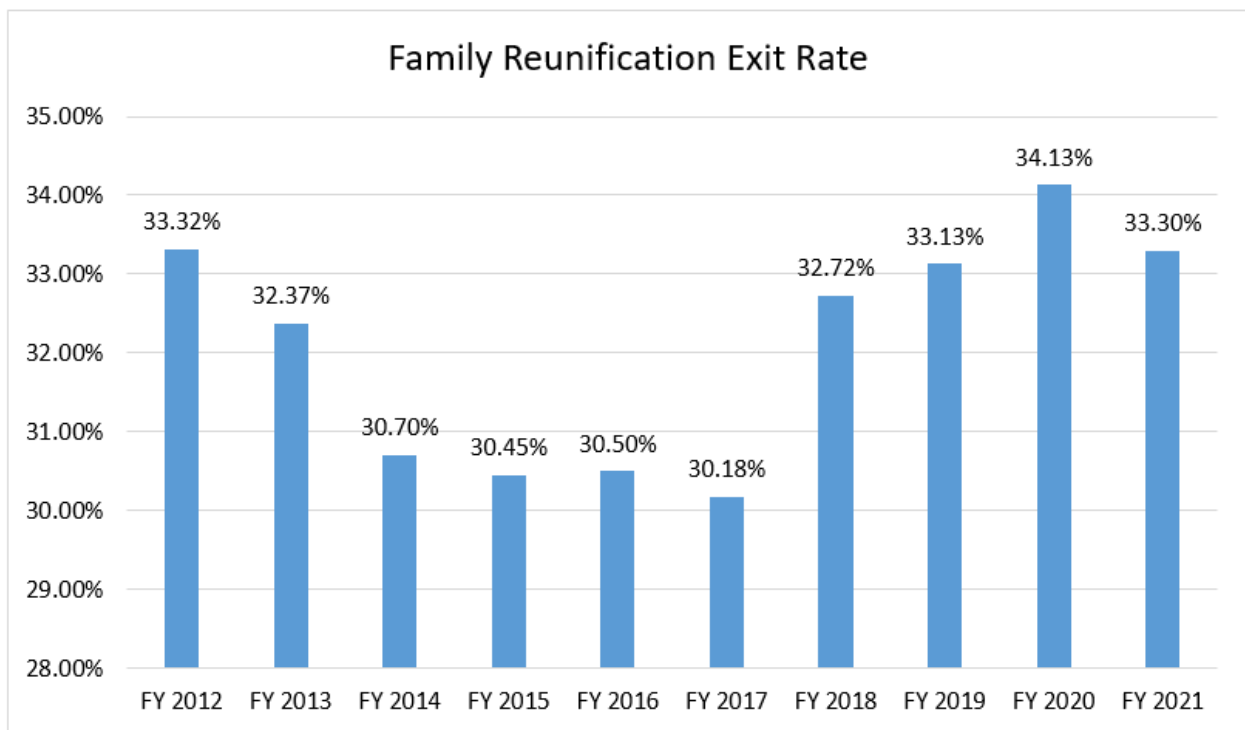
span across multiple hours of travel time with numerous rural areas dotted in between.

Most of these connections are by roadway, often in the form of highways or interstates. Yet, even in the urban centers, public transportation is lacking. Most Texans need a vehicle to navigate the roads of their towns, cities, and metro areas. This means that for almost all parents needing to access services outside the home, for any caregivers to take a child to a doctor’s appointment, or any caseworkers or support staff to facilitate a sibling visit, the way to get there is by a car.

Reunification Data

Another aspect to understanding the context for this report requires reviewing reunification rates of children who have been removed from their families. The most recently available data from the [DFPS Data Book](#) on [Children Existing DFPS Legal Custody](#) shows a reunification rate of 33.3 percent for fiscal year 2021. This rate is largely unchanged since fiscal year 2012. Figure 2 illustrates this trend.

Figure 2. CPS Family Reunification Exit Rate Fiscal Years 2012-21²



² [DFPS Data Book](#), reflecting only “Family Reunification” as the Exit Type.

Transportation Research Findings

Overall, published studies addressing the role of transportation on outcomes for children in out-of-home care and their families suggest transportation can improve access to services, help maintain connections with family members, improve placement stability, and improve employment and education outcomes for older foster youth. See Appendix A.

In a Findley et al. (2022), study where researchers interviewed CASA volunteers, a lack of reliable transportation was found to negatively impact the success of service plans. Specifically, the already existing challenges parents face were made much worse by a lack of reliable transportation. Transportation issues also led to parents being late to court appointments and visits, which contributed to a decreased likelihood of reunification with their children. Recommendations from the study participants included changes within the child welfare system itself and improvements to public transportation infrastructure.

Solutions mentioned in the survey included bus passes, advocacy for improving the public transportation structure, ensuring equitable attention when providing transportation assistance, providing more information on how to access the public transportation available to them, and a sliding scale ride service, shared group rides, or payment codes for existing services (e.g. Lyft and Uber). Making CPS offices more accessible by having them closer to the city center, requesting closer bus stops to the offices, and creating more smaller satellite offices.

One of the primary other solutions included reasons why transportation influences outcomes for parents in the child welfare system is that it can overcome limitations posed by proximity of services to one's home community. In Weiner et al. (2011), researchers evaluated the proximity to mental health and non-clinical resources (e.g., boys and girls clubs, etc.) and the impact on stable, community-based foster care placements. The sample included 1,448 cases from 2007-09. Results show proximity to wraparound programs for youth in foster care impacts placement disruption primarily in rural and suburban areas. The farther youth are from these programs, the more likely they are to experience placement disruption. Recommendations from the study include improving transportation services in these areas to help prevent placement disruption.

Carnochan et al. (2013), reviews many factors impacting reunification including transportation. The paper lists "Promising Practices for Achieving Reunification", which includes engagement and parental visiting/contact. The paper also reviews program models in different states and describes their effectiveness and implementation. The Intensive Reunification Program of Kansas Children's Service League explains that providing transportation assistance is an important support for the program as it alleviates time constraints for the parents and enables them to have more visitation with their children. The importance of transportation for reunification is also supported by Hayward et al. (2007), which highlights many factors that hinder the reunification of children and their incarcerated parent. Ongoing contact and

visitation provide many benefits to the child, but comes with challenges as time and transportation are needed.

Transportation accessibility impacts youth themselves. In Barnow et al. (2013), data from transition programs were collected from caseworkers on 1,058 youth over a 2 year period. Job preparation, transportation, childcare, education support services and life skills were the most common services provided. The longer the youth received these services from the transition programs, the more education and employment outcomes they achieved.

Transportation Focus Group

The transportation focus group included 18 participants – Child Protective Services' Permanency division, four Texas CASA representatives, and 12 DFPS HSTs³. The purpose of the focus group was to determine the caseworker-requested support provided by HSTs to Child Protective Services clients as it relates to transportation and positive permanency outcomes.

The schedule included two pre-planning meetings in April and May 2022, two virtually held focus group sessions in May, and a follow-up meeting with Texas CASA in August 2022.

Outcomes

The majority of HSTs assist with transporting children to various appointments and parent-child visitations. There were a limited number of HSTs who assist parents with transportation to and from their parent-child visitations or other appointments, and instead concentrate efforts to ensure a child's transportation.

Urban vs. Rural

Depending on the rural or urban location of the HSTs, the number of visits they were able to assist with varied. Urban-based HSTs could coordinate more transportation requests to and from parent-child visitations but were not able to provide more supervision of those visitations. This did not appear to negatively impact parent-child visitations as there are contracted supervision services available to supervise parent-child visitations. These contracted services ensure child safety and documentation of parent-child visitations.

In rural areas, HSTs both transported and supervised consistently due to the high mileage to and from the location of a parent-child visit and cited more time spent driving on average. Rural HSTs also reported the need to supervise visitations due to a lack of contracted service providers available in the region to assist in supervising visitations.

³ HSTs provide support services to clients, including transportation to and from appointments and documentation of services provided. They can also supervise visitations between parents and children or between sibling groups. HSTs routinely interact with DFPS staff, clients, external stakeholders, and the general public.

Additional Transportation Assistance

When HSTs are not able to assist with transportation requests, DFPS staff (primarily caseworkers) attempt to coordinate with another unit's HST to arrange transportation. The majority of HSTs also reported to try to reschedule the parent-child visitation for another day or time to be able to accommodate it into their schedule. If no alternative can be found, the HSTs notify the caseworker that they are unavailable.

Some HSTs have the support of their local CASA program to assist with transportation. Information provided in the focus group by CASA included documentation that 34 of the total CASA programs offer transportation assistance. CASA reported there is limited transportation due to COVID-19 and liability concerns. Even as the pandemic wanes, liability concerns persist.

To assist parents with transportation needs, DFPS implemented the Volunteer Expansion program as a part of the [State Business Plan](#)⁴ to strengthen parental engagement. The initiative hoped to train volunteers to assist biological parents with transportation to visits and appointments. However, when asked about this program no HST was aware or had any knowledge of the initiative.

The majority of HSTs reported parents utilize bus tickets, tokens, or passes to be able to get to parent-child visits or other appointments. HSTs reported parents were informed of services available for them, if HST transportation could not be provided. Rural HSTs reported services such as "city roll rides" to go from rural area to a city for specific services.

HST Impact on Reunification

In regard to the impact of their job role on reunification outcomes for children and families, the HST focus group participants agreed that their roles are important because parent-child visitations are a main part of a case and vital to child permanency and well-being. Parent-child attendance and participation informs the court if the parents are attending visitations or not. HSTs in the focus group also agreed they are not always aware of what is happening in a specific case and believe their role is to ensure parent-child visitations occur and to be aware of any potential safety concerns with the visitations.

Conclusion

When parents are able to access services, the chances of a successful reunification increase. Therefore, transportation access and availability, whether by car or public transportation, is integral to moving the needle to increase reunification rates, which have been largely unchanged in the past several years. Few parents live close enough to required services on their

⁴ Child Protective Services Business Plan, Fiscal Year 2019;
https://www.dfps.state.tx.us/About_DFPS/Reports_and_Presentations/CPS/documents/2018/2018-09-28-CPS_Business_Plan_Report.pdf

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service plan and court orders, and therefore, often require some form of transportation. This access becomes more difficult in rural and suburban areas.

Additionally, a child's placement stability and parent-child visits affect outcomes. When children have reliable transportation, they can access normalcy activities and services. Transportation to visits with parents, which is crucial to reunification, is paramount. Youth especially need access to transition services that contribute to positive consequences to their life-long achievements in education and employment.

The reviewed literature supports the idea that an investment in transportation services improves outcomes for children and families in the child welfare system. This evidence relates to improving access to family services and visitation, placement stability, and the chances of reunification.

HSTs play a crucial, sometimes unsung, role in helping children achieve permanency through reunification with their parents. This position at DFPS supports cases through transportation and documentation assistance. The people in these positions primarily provide transportation for children, and sometimes parents, to parent-child visits and other appointments.

List of Acronyms

Acronym	Full Name
CPS	Child Protective Services
CASA	Court Appointed Special Advocates
DFPS	Department of Family and Protective Services
HST	Human Services Technician
U.S.	United States

Appendix A: References

Burt S. Barnow, Amy Buck, Kirk O'Brien, Peter Pecora, Mei Ling Ellis, Eric Steiner. First published March 5, 2013.

["Effective services for improving education and employment outcomes for children and alumni of foster care service: correlates and educational and employment outcomes"](#)

Transition programs in five major U.S. cities were evaluated. Job preparation, transportation, childcare, education support services and life skills were the most common services provided to youth. The longer the youth were enrolled in transition programs, the more education and employment outcomes they achieved. Job preparation and income support services were associated significantly with achieving any positive education or employment outcome.

Sarah Carnochan, Chris Lee, Michael J. Austin. Published online May 24, 2013.

["Achieving Timely Reunification"](#)

This paper reviews factors that impact reunification. Access to services and visitations contribute to timely reunifications. The Intensive Reunification Program of Kansas Children's Service League includes "providing transportation assistance, cost-effective ways to have weekly meals together, and a comfortable and accessible location to hold group activity sessions" in its implementation.

Erin Findley, LMSW, Jandel Crutchfield, PhD, LMSW. First published January 6, 2022.

["Accessibility of transportation to child-welfare involved parents and the related impact on court-ordered service participation"](#)

This study includes a literature review on transportation and child welfare, which is a great reference itself. CASA volunteers were interviewed and were asked questions about their experiences of transportation access for parents and children. The study found: transportation issues exacerbate existing challenges; transportation supports the success of court-ordered services; and practical recommendations stem from transportation justice.

R.A. Hayward, D. DePanfilis. First Published June 22, 2007.

["Foster Children with an Incarcerated Parent: Predictors of Reunification"](#)

Ongoing contact and visitation may be important for child development, reduce emotional damage to children, and reduce later criminal behavior in children of incarcerated parents (Johnston, 1995b) but may be difficult for workers to initiate due to the time and travel needed to transport children to correctional facilities (Lee et al., 2005).

Dana A. Weiner, Scott C. Leon, Michael J. Stiehl. First published February 23, 2011.

["Demographic, Clinical, and Geographic Predictors of Placement Disruption among"](#)

[Foster Care Youth Receiving Wraparound Services](#)

This study seeks to determine the impact of proximity to resources on the effectiveness of a wraparound program for stabilizing foster care placements among a sample of youth. Using Geographic Information Systems, the researchers developed proximity scores for individual clients. “A strategic approach to designing wraparound implementation might call for rural SOC [System of Care] agencies to increase the number of home-based services provided and to factor transportation into clinical planning.” Awareness of proximity scores can facilitate contracting approaches that “require providers to offer more extensive home-based and transportation services in areas in which children with low proximity scores are located.”